



Breastfeeding Background Information

The New Zealand workforce is changing. The number of women in paid work continues to increase, women are increasingly returning to work following parental leave and many employees have family responsibilities.

Why is it important?

Ministry of Health recommends exclusively breastfeeding babies until 6 months of age. [Research](#) shows that women are more likely to continue breastfeeding for a longer period if they receive support from their employer.



Facts

By putting in place practical steps to help women to continue to breastfeed their babies or express breast milk when they return to work benefits both the mother and the workplace. Some of the research [shows](#) the benefits for the workplace include:

- Increased productivity and decreased absenteeism as babies are less likely to get [sick](#)
- Higher staff retention as mothers are more likely to return to the same employer
- Improved corporate image and attracts talent as the workplace is known as being a family-friendly and supportive workplace.

Breastfeeding in New Zealand

The New Zealand Health Survey 2019-2020 breastfeeding statistics indicate that exclusively breastfeeding rates significantly drop between from 49.9% at 4 months to only 7.6% at 6 months (the time when paid parental leave stops).

Breastfeeding is a basic human right. The [Employment Relations \(Breaks, Infant Feeding and Other Matters\) Amendment Act 2008](#) requires employers to [provide appropriate facilities and breaks](#) for employees who wish to breastfeed during work, where it is reasonable and practicable.

The amendments balance the need to support work-life balance and child-care responsibilities of employees, with work commitments.

Key messages

- Workplaces that support women to continue breastfeeding have benefits for both the staff and the workplace.
- Breastfeeding is a basic human right and New Zealand law requires workplaces to provide appropriate breastfeeding facilities and breaks for mothers where practicable.
- It is important to educate the staff member about what support the workplace can provide around breastfeeding prior to the staff member going on parental leave.